

# **Election Tool Kit**



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## INTRODUCTION

Provincial elections provide an opportunity for us to work together and ensure key issues impacting people with disabilities are addressed with leaders and candidates of provincial parties. As citizens, together we need to help candidates become aware of the issues affecting our community. The more people let the candidates know about the issues facing people with disabilities, the more notice will be taken of these issues throughout the province.

Many of you will be active at the local level in events such as individual meetings with candidates and all-candidate debates. To assist you with your advocacy efforts, the Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) has prepared this Election Tool Kit. This document will provide you with valuable resources to use when meeting with party candidates to raise awareness of the importance of the issues facing people with disabilities and convey your concerns. Candidates are expected to be visiting your household and attending events this summer and fall in anticipation of a provincial election. The next election is scheduled for April 4, 2016.

This tool kit contains:

- **DISC Election Strategy**
- **DISC Overview**

The Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) was formed by a large cross section of disability advocates, consumers and organizations from across Saskatchewan who are committed to advocating for a respectful, dignified and adequate income support system. As partners in a non-partisan coalition, DISC members have joined together to speak as one voice, working towards a distinct (or separate) income system for people with disabilities that is built on our common vision and principles.
- **SAID Background**

The Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) is an income support program for people with significant and enduring disabilities. It offers individuals the dignity of greater choice of services and participation in their community. DISC was part of the Government/Community Task Team that led to the launch of SAID in May 2009.
- **Questions to ask your candidates**

Suggested questions to ask candidates who campaign at your doorstep.
- **Advocacy Tips**

Your voice is critical to ensuring people with disabilities receive support and recognition from the provincial government. This section contains tips on how you can develop an effective advocacy campaign.

- **Questioning Tips**

Communicating effectively is the key to having your concerns heard. This section offers tips on how to ask questions and convey your concerns effectively to candidates at all-candidate events.

- **Face-to-Face Meetings**

Sometimes organizations hold special meetings with candidates during an election to discuss public policy issues affecting you. This section provides tips on how to make your meeting a success.

- **Post Election Strategies**

Advocating for people with disabilities doesn't stop after the election. Advocating is a year-round activity. In this section you will find strategies to ensure your issues and concerns remain on the government radar throughout the year.

## DISC Election Strategy

**DISC is asking candidates to considering renewing the provincial government's commitment to the SAID program by increasing the monthly payment by \$250 per person.** To achieve this goal, DISC plans to:

1. Identify the issue and profile people living on SAID who are experiencing difficulty making ends meet;
2. Promote a funding increase of \$250 per month to the program for candidates to consider during the election campaign.
3. Question candidates on their commitment to increasing funding to people living on SAID.

One of our primary tools will be a video which helps identify the issues and profiles the challenges that people with disabilities face. The people interviewed in the video discuss the positive things SAID funding has done for them, but at the same time mention how cost-of-living increases are eroding this increased funding. They all emphasized that **an additional \$250** a month would help them pay for food, transportation costs, social outings with family and friends, possibly allow them to start saving some money for the future to deal with any emergencies that might arise. The video will be accompanied with background information on the SAID program, DISC and the impact that an additional \$250 per month will have.

Early in 2016, DISC plans to release the video and background information through a media conference and request that the parties consider making increased funding to SAID as part of their election platforms. After the initial public launch of these items, we will host All-Candidates Forums on Disability Issues in both Regina and Saskatoon. For these events we would invite candidates from the major parties to discuss these issues in an open forum. We would show the video as an introduction to the issue, distribute the background information, and then have questions from the audience based upon items in this information.

We will be highlighting portions of the video through DISC's website and social media accounts (using paid social media advertising to reach a large crowd on a low budget if necessary). We can also take certain audio clips out of the video to create radio advertisements. Since we will not be able to reach every candidate through these forums, we will distribute the information to all candidates via email and provide them with a specific set of questions from which to respond. This email will also contain a link to the video.

**We will be relying on our members and SAID recipients to help us spread the video and information, both of which will be available on [www.saskdisc.ca](http://www.saskdisc.ca), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/saskdisc](https://www.facebook.com/saskdisc) or on Twitter, @DISCsk.** Share the link to the video and information with all of your friends through social media. Our goal is to get the general public passionate about this issue and put pressure on the government to include our message in their campaign platforms.

**You should also take the time to review these materials and reflect on some of the common issues brought up, especially those that affect you in your lives.** When it comes time to question your candidates (more information on that later in the package) the information in the video and action plan will give you some great points to discuss.

## WHAT IS DISC?

The Saskatchewan Disability Income Support Coalition (DISC) was formed by a large cross section of disability advocates, consumers and organizations from across Saskatchewan who are committed to advocating for a respectful, dignified and adequate income support system. As partners in a non-partisan coalition, DISC members have joined together to speak as one voice, working towards a distinct (or separate) income system for people with disabilities that is built on our common vision and principles.

### **Our Vision**

Our primary vision is to see an income system that offers both an adequate baseline income for people with disabilities and a user-friendly mechanism to address individual financial needs based on the impact of disability.

We believe that developing a distinct income program for people with disabilities must be a truly joint venture between all stakeholders, each contributing equally to the process. Together with the Government of Saskatchewan, we bring our rich experience and contribute our expertise to the development of a new income policy for people with disabilities.

As members of DISC we have laid out key principles for an improved system:

**Adequacy** - People with disabilities should have an adequate income that truly meets their needs without the indignity of having to justify their needs. Lifelong disability and subsequent economic insecurity needs to be a consideration. What does DISC consider adequate? A disability income should be enough financial support to meet individual needs, not just basic needs. Our primary aim is to see an income system that offers both an *adequate baseline income for people with disabilities and a user-friendly mechanism to address individual financial needs based on the impact of disability.*

**Hope and Security** - People with disabilities must have financial accommodations so that they can live their lives with hope, respect and dignity instead of a system of disincentives.

**Person-Centered and User Friendly** - People with disabilities should be able to expect a dignified service that focuses on their individual financial needs as its reason for being. Financial accommodation should be easily accessible with consistent, respectful income workers who have the mandate and power to respond quickly to individual discretionary needs.

**Higher Income Exemptions** - People with disabilities must be adequately accommodated as they move into training or employment. Income exemptions need to be increased to eliminate disincentives to employment and independence. Rapid reinstatement needs to be a working principle that allows people with disabilities to feel secure as they move in and out of employment opportunities.

**Consistent Implementation** - People with disabilities should be able to expect a portable and flexible income system that meets their individual needs no matter where they choose to live in the province.

These principles describe a respectful system that truly accommodates disability. It moves away from a welfare-based system that is insufficient, disrespectful and degrading and was never meant to meet the needs of people who may rely on it long-term. Living with a disability should not guarantee a life of financial, emotional or spiritual poverty.

### **What Progress Has Been Achieved?**

- October 2008 – the Government of Saskatchewan announced that they would create a separate, dignified program for people with disabilities: ‘SAID’ (*Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability*)
- December 2008 – DISC joined the joint Government – Community Task Team to develop recommended design options for the new income program.
- May 2009 – *the Government accepted all 50 recommendations of the Task Team and announced that the new income program will be launched on December 1, 2009* with an estimated initial enrollment of up to 3000 individuals. Ultimately, the Government anticipates that between 8,000 and 10,000 individuals will be enrolled on the new income program.
- December 2009 – a limited number of individuals, living in residential care, were enrolled at the launch of the new program.
- December 2010 – the earnings exemption for SAID (and people with disabilities on SAP) was increased. A \$100,000 inheritance exemption for SAID was implemented.
- March 2011 – the budget included funding to develop the assessment tool for SAID, to begin assessing individuals for the next phase of SAID enrollment, as well as a \$50/month increase to SAID clients in residential care settings beginning in January 2012.
- May 2011 – the first SAID office is opened in Saskatoon.
- October 2011 – Premier Wall announced that SAID would be expanded to include individuals who live independently in community and that benefits would increase in 2012-13 by:
  - An additional \$40/month for individuals in residential care (this is in addition to the \$50/month increase that began in January 2012)
  - \$200/month for single people living independently in community
  - \$230/month for couples living independently in community

- June 2012 – the application process for SAID was opened to anyone with a significant and enduring disability in Saskatchewan.
  - The benefit rate increase of a minimum of \$200/month began for people living independently in community. Individuals living in residential care received a benefit rate increase of \$0 a month in addition to the \$50/month increase that began in January 2012.
- May 2013 – 10,000 people were currently enrolled on SAID; that number has now reached more than 15,000.
- June 2013 – benefits for people living independently increased by \$50/month. Benefits for people living in residential care increased by \$20/month
- 2014-15 – additional yearly benefit rate increases that were promised during the 2011 election campaign were implemented.

There has been no commitment from the government to make additional increases to the program despite increases in the cost of living in the province. There has also been no commitment to index increases to inflation. DISC is currently advocating for an additional \$250 per month for SAID recipients as soon as possible. DISC recognizes that these increases may need to be staggered over time.

## **DISC MEMBERS**

AIDS Saskatoon  
ALS Society of Saskatchewan  
Arthritis Society -- Saskatchewan Division  
Autism Resource Centre  
Autism Services  
Canadian Association for Williams Syndrome  
Canadian Deafblind Association – Saskatchewan Chapter Inc. (CDBA)  
Canadian Mental Health Association (Saskatchewan Division) Inc.  
CNIB  
DAWN Saskatoon –  
RAFH Saskatchewan  
Epilepsy Saskatoon  
Equal Justice for All-Saskatoon  
FASD Support Network of Saskatchewan Inc.  
Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) Disability Working Group  
Gary Tinker Federation for the Disabled Inc. IDEA Regina  
Metis Family and Community Justice Services of Saskatchewan  
Métis Nation Saskatchewan  
MS Society of Canada Saskatchewan Division  
Muscular Dystrophy Canada (SK)  
Neil Squire Society  
North Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre (NSILC)  
People First of Saskatchewan  
People with disabilities  
Phoenix Residential Society  
Prince Albert Community Service Centre  
Regina Anti-Poverty Ministry (RAPM)  
Saskatchewan Association for Community Living (SACL)  
SARC  
Saskatchewan Brain Injury Association (SBIA)  
Saskatchewan Cerebral Palsy Association  
Saskatoon Council on Aging  
Saskatchewan Down Syndrome Society  
Saskatchewan Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services  
Saskatchewan Families for Effective Autism Treatment (SASKFEAT)  
Saskatchewan Seniors Mechanism  
Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities  
Saskatoon Anti-Poverty Coalition  
Saskatoon Council on Aging (SCOA)  
Saskatoon Housing Coalition  
Schizophrenia Society of Saskatchewan  
Spinal Cord Injury Saskatchewan Inc.  
South Saskatchewan Independent Living Centre (SSILC)  
Spina Bifida & Hydrocephalus Assoc of Saskatchewan North (SBHASN)

## **Background Information on the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) Program**

DISC became part of the Government/Community Task Team, which eventually led to the launch of Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) in May 2009. The SAID program provides an income for persons with significant and long-term disabilities separate from the Saskatchewan Assistance Program.

In 2010, the earnings exemption for SAID was increased. A \$100,000 life insurance/inheritance exemption for SAID was also implemented. The provincial budget the following year included funding to develop the assessment tool for SAID, to begin assessing individuals for the next phase of SAID enrollment, as well as a \$50/month increase to SAID clients in residential care settings beginning in January 2012.

Despite these successes, DISC members recognized that funding levels needed to increase and the number of people eligible for the program also needed to increase. Discussions with the government led the province to expand the program to include individuals who live independently in the community, and to promise that benefits would increase in 2012-13 by an additional \$40/month for individuals in residential care; \$200/month for single people living independently in community; and \$230/month for couples living independently in community. In making this announcement, Premier Brad Wall indicated that this was part of an overall initiative to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live for persons with disabilities.

DISC has valued its relationship with the government and appreciates it following through on its promises to increase funding to SAID. However, the monthly SAID payments are not keeping pace with the rate of inflation. Currently, a person on SAID receives \$1,350 per month on average. That's only \$45 a day. This money runs out quickly after a person has paid for their food, housing and transportation for the month, not to mention the costs associated with a disability (finding a wheelchair accessible apartment, paying for paratransit and spending extra money on medication or healthy food to adhere to a doctor-ordered diet).

**In the spirit of cooperation, DISC is asking the government to renew its commitment to the SAID program by increasing the monthly payment by \$250 per person.** This will help us reach the next level in quality of life for people with disabilities.

Although DISC realizes that it may take time to implement this funding, each passing day is a period of struggle and deprivation for people relying on SAID.

**DISC encourages all candidates, no matter their political affiliation, to advocate for an increase in SAID funding by \$250 per month per person to reach a meaningful, socially acceptable level of income.**

Further to this, members of the public are encouraged to voice their support for an increase in funding to SAID. For more information, visit DISC at [www.saskdisc.ca](http://www.saskdisc.ca), on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/saskdisc](http://www.facebook.com/saskdisc) or on Twitter, @DISCsk.

## **QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR CANDIDATE**

***What supports is your party offering to assist with people with disabilities?***

***What do you know about the SAID program?***

If the candidate doesn't know about the program, provide him/her with a copy of the one-pager and discuss it with that person.

***If elected, would you increase funding to all SAID recipients?***

***Low oil prices and the rising cost of living are beginning to take a toll on people relying on SAID. If your party is elected, how quickly will you act on this issue?***

***How important is this issue to you?***

***Many people with disabilities are living on less than \$45 per day. That includes all their basic needs including food and shelter. Do you think that is adequate support?***

***We are asking for an increase in SAID funding by \$250 per month per person. What is your response to this position?***

## **ADVOCACY TIPS**

A provincial election provides individuals with the opportunity to implement an advocacy strategy and to re-affirm to the candidates how important it is to support people with disabilities. Included are some tips on starting an effective advocacy campaign in your community.

### **1. Get to know your candidates**

Some candidates will have ties to the disability community and will understand the Impact living with a disability has on day-to-day life, while others may not be familiar with the issues. It is important for you to become a helpful contact for providing useful information on disability issues to the candidates in your riding.

### **2. Look for opportunities to send local candidates information**

When sending a letter to a candidate, introduce yourself as a constituent and state your reason for writing in the first paragraph. A sample letter is included in this tool kit.

### **3. Participate in candidate forums, town hall meetings and “meet and greet” events**

Attend political events and introduce yourself to the candidates as a member of the people with disabilities community.

### **4. Provide opinion pieces or “letters to the editor” in local papers**

Raise issues in a way that will be positive and visible to candidates and the community. Send a copy of your printed editorial or letter to all candidates and other influential policy-makers.

### **5. Participate in larger provincial and national advocacy campaigns.**

Send information to candidates in your constituency. The more people involved in advocating on this issue, the more likely your issues and concerns will be heard.

### **6. Focus on ways to improve SAID**

Bring your SAID Backgrounder along to leave with candidates as a reminder of the value of improving the program.

## QUESTIONING TIPS

For questioning your provincial candidates at all-candidate meetings:

### General Tips

Be absolutely clear about what you are asking. There are sample questions in this tool kit to ask your MLA candidates at All- Candidate meetings or forums.

1. Remember, response of any kind is useful. By posing the question at a public meeting, you are transmitting a clear signal of your interest and concern on this issue.
2. Do not be discouraged if candidates are not immediately supportive. Hearing their views and justification of a position is valuable and a fundamental part of the democratic process.

### Steps to Take:

#### 1. Find your MLA incumbent and candidates

- Visit [http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/members/members/mla\\_list.htm](http://www.legassembly.sk.ca/members/members/mla_list.htm) or the Elections Saskatchewan website at [www.elections.sk.ca](http://www.elections.sk.ca) for a list of MLAs.
- Visit the websites of party candidates in your riding. Here are the links to the major parties - be sure to also visit the websites of any other party that has a candidate in your riding:
  - Saskatchewan Green Party: [www.greenpartysask.ca](http://www.greenpartysask.ca)
  - Saskatchewan Liberal Party: [www.saskliberals.ca](http://www.saskliberals.ca)
  - Saskatchewan New Democratic Party: [www.saskndp.ca](http://www.saskndp.ca)
  - Saskatchewan Party: [www.saskparty.com](http://www.saskparty.com)
  - Saskatchewan Progressive Conservative Party: [www.pcsask.ca](http://www.pcsask.ca)
- Familiarize yourself with the main components of each party's platform. Look particularly for references to people with disabilities.

#### 2. Prepare for the All-Candidates meeting

- Know your candidate: Check out their websites and latest printed materials.
- Find out if they have met with local groups before on related issues. If so, what was the outcome? Have they ever spoken publicly or via the media about people with disabilities in Saskatchewan?
- Prepare your question. Decide what follow-up questions you will pose if necessary.
- Record each candidate's response to your question.

### **3. The Meeting or Forum**

A typical all-candidates meeting lasts for a pre-determined period of time, usually one to two hours. Prepare to do a lot of listening, as the candidates will do the majority of the talking. The question period could be open-mike or could require pre-registration on a speaker's list. You will need to research this prior to the meeting to ensure you have the opportunity to address the candidate.

- Get to the microphone quickly. Those at the end of the line may not be heard due to time limitations.
- State your question concisely, clearly and in everyday language.
- Keep a positive tone: listen actively, show interest in and understanding of their point of view.
- Thank the candidates for their answers.
- Record who has said what before leaving.

### **4. Follow-up**

- Write a letter thanking each candidate for answering your question(s), reiterating what changes you would like made affecting the SAID program.
- If they were supportive, thank them and make it clear that you expect their continued support in the Saskatchewan Legislature.

### **5. How to Ask Questions at an All-Candidate Meeting**

The speaker should begin by introducing themselves and pose a question to all candidates, seeking a commitment to the issue at hand.

Refer to this tool kit for specific questions to ask your candidates.

## **ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS**

### **General Tips**

It is possible to have private meetings with candidates (one on one), during an election, to discuss your issues or to request support for your particular argument/issue. You can even request a candidate's support to retain, oppose or change a law, policy or decision if he or she is elected by any level of government in Saskatchewan.

During an election campaign, the key to holding successful meetings is to be strictly non-partisan (without an affiliation or designation that would create a representation or special interest). To do so:

1. Try to meet with every candidate in your riding
2. Follow the same agenda with each candidate
3. Keep all meetings to the same length of time
4. Ask the candidate to retain, oppose or change legislation or policy if they are elected
6. Take copies of the SAID Backgrounder as a leave-behind for the candidate
7. Lead with education, follow with a call for action. Some candidates will not be familiar with your issues.
8. Help them understand the current situation (in non-technical terms). Personify the issue by telling a story about yourself, another individual or family. Then tell the candidate how you would like to see the situation improved.

## SUGGESTED LETTERS

This is a sample letter that you can send to the Premier, local candidates or to your local newspaper:

*{Date}*

The Hon. Brad Wall  
Premier of Saskatchewan  
Room 226,  
2405 Legislative Drive  
Regina, SK S4S0B3}

Dear Premier Wall,

I am enrolled in the Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (SAID) program. I would like to thank you for vowing to make Saskatchewan the best place in Canada to live for persons with disabilities. Increasing SAID funding over the years has helped me to obtain a better quality of life. [Share some of your own personal successes on SAID].

Unfortunately, with the cost of living on the increase, SAID funding is not enough to live a life with dignity. Currently, a person on SAID receives \$1,350 per month on average. That's only \$45 a day. [Share some of your own personal struggles making ends meet on SAID in the present day]

I am asking your government to renew its commitment to the SAID program by increasing the payment by \$250 per month per person. This will help people such as myself to live with dignity and not have to compromise our health in order to save a few dollars at the end of the month. A 2015 Canadian Mental Health Association Survey found that over 88 per cent of Saskatchewan residents think people with disabilities should receive \$1,600 or more per month, which indicates there is considerable public support for increased funding.

I realize that it may take time to implement this funding, but each passing day is a period of struggle and challenges for people like me relying on SAID. Imagine living on \$45 a day... could you do it?

Thanks again for your support over the years. Once again, in the spirit of cooperation and respect I am urging the government to increase said funding by \$250 per month per person to help us reach the next level in quality of life

Yours sincerely,

*{Name}*

*{Title}*

*{Address}*

*{Phone number}*

## **POST ELECTION STRATEGIES**

1. Establish a relationship with your Member of the Legislative Assembly – send a letter of congratulations and indicate your willingness to work and support him/her in common areas of interest.
2. Put your elected representative on your mailing list.
3. Provide year-round information to politicians and government officials about your activities and interests. Remind them of the significant role you play in the community.
4. Send posters and other items from special events to politicians and government officials, if appropriate. These materials serve as a constant reminder of your organization and of the issues.